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Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
Council of Western Treaty 8 Chiefs

AGREEMENT PROVIDES BENEFITS, IMPROVED CO-OPERATION

FORT ST. JOHN – Today, on Treaty 8 territory, the Province and chiefs of four Treaty 8 First Nations signed an economic benefits agreement that will provide a share of financial benefits from natural resource development on part of the First Nations' territory to their communities and enhance land-use collaboration in B.C.'s northeast region, Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Minister Michael de Jong and the chiefs announced.

"This agreement signifies an important step forward in the partnership between Treaty 8 First Nations and government," said de Jong. "It establishes the foundation for members of these Treaty 8 First Nations to share in the benefits of resource activity, and contributes to an improved climate of co-operation."

The agreement confirms the obligations for meaningful consultation by the Province with Treaty 8 First Nations.

"This agreement is about our working together with B.C. to create certainty of process so that development can proceed in a more fair and responsible way," said the First Nations' spokesperson, Tribal Chief Liz Logan. "It is not about giving up our rights. The obligations to consult and accommodate are clarified. We'll continue to look to industry to enter into impact benefit agreements with us. We'll continue to insist that our Treaty be respected."

"We are committed to sharing the benefits and opportunities created through the development of oil and gas resources with First Nations," said Richard Neufeld, Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources. "This agreement increases certainty for the northeast as a whole."

The four members of the Council of Western Treaty 8 Chiefs that have ratified the agreement are Doig River, Fort Nelson, Prophet River, and West Moberly First Nations. The agreement provides for an initial equity payment of $13.3 million and revenue-sharing payments between $3.4 and $13.4 million per year for 15 years. Revenue-sharing payments will be linked to the level of activity from oil and gas, mining, and forestry development in the northeast region.

The funds provided to the Treaty 8 First Nations will be paid into a trust for the benefit of the signatory Treaty 8 First Nations. Additional equity payments will be made upon completion of land and resource management agreements, which are currently under negotiation.

The four Nations are located in northeast British Columbia, an area rich in oil, gas, mineral and forestry resources. "We have seen the natural resources within our Treaty area depleted for over 100 years, and seen little benefit until recently," said Logan. "This agreement with the Province provides us with the financial means to be better stewards of our lands, and to better take advantage of the various economic opportunities around us. Our vision is for our member communities to become healthy and self-sufficient."

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"The agreements we're working on now are about effective resource management. We want to ensure there's a good balance between protection of our lands and economic opportunities so there's something left for future generations," said Vice Tribal Chief Roland Willson. "The Elders have told us that it's not about the money, it's about the land. We're happy to have the economic benefits agreement signed, but our priority is the resource management agreements."

The Province is committed to concluding the resource management agreements before the end of 2009. The economic benefits agreement is part of a broader process; emphasis will now shift to the other, equally important components of building a stable framework for improved relations with the Treaty 8 Nations.

British Columbia is building a new relationship with First Nations founded on mutual respect, recognition and reconciliation, which will allow Aboriginal people to participate in the province's economic and social progress.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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